

# Understanding the Therapeutic Alliance between Nurses and Consumers with Anorexia Nervosa in the Context of the Inpatient Setting: a Mixed Methods Study

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Student: Joel Sebastian Zugai, RN, BN (Hons)

Degree: PhD

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## **Certificate of Original Authorship**

This thesis is the result of a research candidature conducted jointly with another University as part of a collaborative Doctoral degree. I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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-Joel

## Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Certificate of Original Authorship .....                              | ii  |
| Acknowledgements .....  | iii |
| List of Figures and Tables .....                                      | ix  |
| Figures .....   | ix  |
| Tables .....  | ix  |
| Abstract .....  | x   |
| <b>Chapter One: Introduction</b> .....                                | 1   |
| The Need for Evidence .....   | 2   |
| Therapeutic Alliance .....  | 3   |
| Originality of Research .....   | 4   |
| Summary .....   | 5   |
| Dissertation Structure .....  | 5   |
| Key Terms .....   | 7   |
| <b>Chapter Two: Therapeutic Alliance</b> .....                        | 9   |
| Introduction .....  | 9   |
| Therapeutic Alliance: A Psychoanalytic Concept .....                  | 9   |
| Summary of the Contemporary Dyadic Alliance .....                     | 13  |
| Nursing and Therapeutic Alliance .....                                | 14  |
| The Interpersonal History of Nursing .....                            | 15  |
| Contemporary Nursing and Therapeutic Alliance .....                   | 19  |
| A Revolution in Mental Healthcare .....                               | 21  |
| Recovery .....  | 23  |
| Therapeutic Alliance and Contextual Implications .....                | 25  |
| Therapeutic Alliance and Contextual Correspondence .....              | 26  |
| Cross Disciplinary Comparison .....                                   | 26  |
| Therapeutic Alliance in the Dyad and in Nursing .....                 | 27  |
| Therapeutic Alliance and Contextual Variation .....                   | 29  |
| Ward Context: atmosphere and milieu .....                             | 31  |
| Summary .....   | 31  |
| <b>Chapter Three: Anorexia Nervosa and Therapeutic Alliance</b> ..... | 33  |
| Introduction .....  | 33  |
| Anorexia Nervosa .....  | 33  |
| Contemporary Definition .....   | 34  |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| History of Anorexia Nervosa .....                                       | 35 |
| Aetiology .....   | 36 |
| Anorexia Nervosa and Mental Health.....                                 | 37 |
| Anorexia Nervosa and Physical Health .....                              | 37 |
| Anorexia Nervosa and Clinical Care .....                                | 38 |
| Care and Consent.....   | 40 |
| Continuity of Care and Social Support .....                             | 40 |
| Developing Evidence for the Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa .....         | 41 |
| Therapeutic Alliance: Consumer and Nursing Perspectives .....           | 42 |
| Anorexia Nervosa and Implications for Therapeutic Alliance.....         | 43 |
| Anorexia Nervosa, Therapeutic Alliance and Variations in Evidence ..... | 45 |
| Summary .....   | 46 |
| <b>Chapter Four: Method</b> .....                                       | 48 |
| Introduction .....  | 48 |
| Aim .....   | 48 |
| Design.....   | 48 |
| Research Design .....   | 50 |
| Participants .....  | 50 |
| Consumer Participants.....  | 51 |
| Nursing Participants .....  | 51 |
| Phase One .....   | 51 |
| Phase Two .....   | 52 |
| Procedure.....  | 52 |
| Data Collection.....  | 54 |
| Phase One .....   | 54 |
| Instruments .....   | 55 |
| The Inpatient Treatment Alliance Scale: The I-TAS.....                  | 55 |
| The Essen Climate Evaluation Schema: The EssenCES.....                  | 56 |
| The Client Assessment of Treatment Scale: The CAT Scale .....           | 57 |
| The Eating Disorder Examination-Questionnaire: EDE-Q .....              | 58 |
| The Attitudes towards Acute Mental Health Scale: The ATAMHS-33 .....    | 58 |
| Phase Two .....   | 59 |
| Data Analysis .....   | 60 |
| Phase One Data Analysis.....  | 61 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Phase Two Data Analysis.....  | 61 |
| Ethical Considerations.....   | 62 |
| Consent .....   | 62 |
| Risk, Benefits and Management .....                                   | 63 |
| Data Management .....   | 65 |
| Summary .....   | 66 |
| <b>Chapter Five: Results</b> .....                                    | 67 |
| Introduction .....  | 67 |
| The Sites of Data Collection .....                                    | 67 |
| Phase One .....   | 67 |
| Consumer Data .....   | 68 |
| I-TAS: Inpatient-Treatment Alliance Score.....                        | 68 |
| EssenCES: Essen Climate Evaluation Schema.....                        | 68 |
| CAT: Consumer Assessment of Treatment .....                           | 68 |
| EDE-Q: Eating Disorder Examination- Questionnaire .....               | 69 |
| Nursing Data .....  | 69 |
| EssenCES: Essen Climate Evaluation Schema.....                        | 69 |
| ATAMHS-33: Attitudes Towards Acute Mental Health 33 .....             | 69 |
| Comparison of Nurse and Consumer EssenCES.....                        | 70 |
| Ward Differences .....  | 70 |
| Summary of Phase One Findings .....                                   | 72 |
| Phase Two .....   | 73 |
| Demographic Data .....  | 73 |
| Consumer Participants.....  | 73 |
| Nursing Participants.....   | 75 |
| Themes.....   | 75 |
| The Nature of Relationships .....                                     | 76 |
| Genuine Caring: <i>‘I always feel like they genuinely care’</i> ..... | 77 |
| <i>Non-judgemental, positive regard</i> .....                         | 78 |
| <i>Empathy, understanding and sensitivity</i> .....                   | 79 |
| <i>Motherly/sisterly nursing</i> .....                                | 81 |
| Creating a Caring Milieu: <i>‘feeling more at home’</i> .....         | 81 |
| <i>Normalisation and comfort</i> .....                                | 82 |
| <i>Safety and security</i> .....                                      | 82 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Interpersonal Dynamics of Anorexia Nervosa .....  | 83  |
| Pathological Sabotage: <i>'we see nurses as the baddies'</i> .....                                    | 83  |
| <i>Disunity of goals and perceived coercion</i> .....   | 83  |
| <i>Frustration and emotional fatigue</i> .....  | 85  |
| Therapeutic Separation: <i>'developing insight'</i> .....   | 85  |
| <i>Distinguishing the consumer from the illness</i> .....   | 86  |
| <i>Recognising and externalising pathology</i> .....  | 87  |
| <i>Recognising caring intent</i> .....  | 87  |
| The Rules and the Nurse's Authority .....   | 88  |
| Therapeutic Maintenance of Authority and Professional Boundaries: <i>'love and limits'</i> .....      | 88  |
| <i>Collaboration and authority</i> .....  | 89  |
| <i>Compromised boundaries: alterations in the orientation of authority</i> .....                      | 90  |
| Consistency of Nursing Expectations: <i>'it is easier when the rules are consistently applied'</i> .. | 93  |
| <i>Safety and predictability</i> .....  | 93  |
| <i>Rationalisation and non-punitive intent</i> .....  | 94  |
| <i>Fairness</i> .....   | 95  |
| <i>Confusion and ambiguity</i> .....  | 95  |
| <i>Helpful modifications</i> .....  | 96  |
| Contextual Factors .....  | 96  |
| Hospitalisation and the Nursing Role .....  | 97  |
| <i>Comfort, privacy and dignity</i> .....   | 97  |
| <i>Workload factors</i> .....   | 99  |
| <i>Opportunity for interpersonal engagement</i> .....   | 102 |
| <i>Nursing education and proficiency</i> .....  | 103 |
| The Implications of Internal Group Dynamics .....   | 104 |
| <i>Interactions within the consumer group</i> .....   | 104 |
| <i>Interactions within the nursing team</i> .....   | 107 |
| Time in Hospital .....  | 108 |
| Summary of Results .....  | 109 |
| <b>Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion</b> .....   | 110 |
| Introduction .....  | 110 |
| Context and the Therapeutic Alliance .....  | 111 |
| Anorexia Nervosa as an Illness .....  | 111 |
| The Inpatient Setting and Nursing Role .....  | 112 |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Ward Milieu .....   | 113        |
| Nursing Workload .....  | 114        |
| Time in Hospital .....  | 114        |
| Love and Limits .....   | 114        |
| ‘Love’: Positive Interpersonal Dynamics .....                     | 115        |
| ‘Limits’: Therapeutic Power .....                                 | 116        |
| Consistency in Care: Curtailing Ambivalence.....                  | 118        |
| Flexibility: Individualised Care .....                            | 119        |
| Therapeutic Separation.....                                       | 120        |
| Recognition of Consumer Uniqueness.....                           | 121        |
| Mutuality: Trust .....  | 121        |
| Maternalism.....  | 122        |
| Challenges in Developing the Therapeutic Alliance.....            | 124        |
| Emotional withdrawal.....   | 124        |
| Punitive Role Assumptions .....                                   | 125        |
| Professional Boundaries and the Power Differential.....           | 126        |
| Nursing Age and Boundary Implications.....                        | 126        |
| Recovery.....   | 127        |
| Implications.....   | 128        |
| The Inpatient Setting.....  | 129        |
| Staffing, Workload and Routine.....                               | 129        |
| A Team Based Approach .....                                       | 130        |
| Education and Professional Development.....                       | 130        |
| Maintaining the Therapeutic Merit of the Power Differential ..... | 131        |
| Recommendations for Therapeutic Separation.....                   | 131        |
| Avoiding Punitive Role Assumptions.....                           | 131        |
| Professional Satisfaction .....                                   | 132        |
| Returning Consumer Autonomy .....                                 | 133        |
| Limitations .....   | 134        |
| Reflexivity.....  | 135        |
| Future Directions for Research .....                              | 135        |
| Conclusion.....   | 137        |
| <b>Appendices .....</b>   | <b>139</b> |
| <b>Bibliography.....</b>  | <b>186</b> |



## List of Figures and Tables

### Figures

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1 Visual Model of Study Design .....       | 49 |
| Figure 2 Instruments and Analytical Approach..... | 60 |

### Tables

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1 Contextual Differences between the Traditional Dyadic Therapeutic Alliance and the Nurse-Consumer Therapeutic Alliance in the Inpatient Mental Health Setting (Extra-dyadic)..... | 30 |
| Table 2 EssenCES Subscale Scores (Consumers) .....  | 68 |
| Table 3 EDE-Q Subscales Scores.....   | 69 |
| Table 4: EssenCES Subscales (Nurses).....   | 69 |
| Table 5: ATAMHS-33 Subscales and Overall Score .....  | 70 |
| Table 6: Comparison of EssenCES Subscales.....  | 70 |
| Table 7: Consumer Survey Scales, by Unit .....  | 71 |
| Table 8: Nurse Survey Scales, by Unit .....   | 72 |
| Table 9: Consumer Demographic Data .....  | 74 |
| Table 10: Qualitative Themes .....  | 76 |

## **Abstract**

**Introduction and Aims:** The evidence informing the treatment of anorexia nervosa is limited. It is established that consumers with AN value professional interpersonal relationships with nurses, finding these relationships meaningful and therapeutic. A therapeutic alliance is associated with enhanced outcomes, and may be a promising aspect of the treatment for AN. However, therapeutic alliance is not well understood in the context of the inpatient setting. The aim of this research was to establish a greater understanding of the nature of the therapeutic alliance between nurses and consumers with anorexia nervosa, within the context of the inpatient setting.

**Method:** This study employed a mixed methods approach, two phase explanatory sequential design. The initial phase consisted of a quantitative investigation, involving both consumers and nurses in surveys. Surveys measured the perceived degree of alliance, and investigated other elements of ward context. The subsequent qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with both nurses and consumers. Interviews were focused on the relationships between nurses and consumers and the implications of ward context on those relationships. Interviews also developed a qualitative understanding for interpreting the quantitative findings.

**Results:** Consumers reported a relatively low perceived alliance with nurses, a relatively low perceived satisfaction with care, and a severe degree of eating disorder psychopathology. Nurses reported good attitudes towards consumers with acute mental illness. Consumers and nurses had a diverging perception of the alliance, as nurses perceived a higher strength of alliance compared to consumers. The interviews revealed that the alliance was valued and had positive environmental implications. However, anorexia nervosa as an illness was detrimental to the relationships between nurses and consumers. In developing a therapeutic alliance, nurses and consumers actively separated from the destructive implications of anorexia nervosa. Nurses' use of authority was influential over the development of the alliance. Multiple contextual factors within the ward influenced the therapeutic alliance between nurses and consumers.

**Discussion and Conclusion:** The way that nurses utilised their position of power determined the quality of the therapeutic alliance. A successful therapeutic separation and mutuality was dependent on confidence in the understanding that the orientation of power was employed to credit and protect the consumer. A balance of 'love and limits' developed a therapeutic separation, which preceded the mutuality of a therapeutic alliance. Contextual factors within the inpatient setting can be modified to enhance the capacity for nurses to develop therapeutic alliances with consumers.